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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007094

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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOR ROBIN GILCHRIST AND
STEPHANIE WHELPLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#)
SUBJECT: UNESCO -- EDUCATION ISSUES AT THE 175TH EXECUTIVE BOARD
(FALL 2006)

¶1. (SBU) EDUCATION SECTOR REFORMS In September, the First Lady hosted her highly successful Literacy Conference in New York City, attended by the President and UNESCO's Director General Matsuura. Despite the goodwill generated by the conference and interventions by most members of the Executive Board (EB) about UNESCO's next budget and mid-term strategy that stressed the primacy of education in the Organization's work, some delegations still seemed determined to impede the Education Sector's management plan due to their concerns about issues such as staffing and restructuring.

¶2. (SBU) Over the summer, the Chairman of UNESCO's Finance and Administration (FA) Commission, the Beninese ambassador, Olabiyi Yai, had signaled his unhappiness with the restructuring and reform of UNESCO's Education Sector proposed by the Assistant Director General Peter Smith (US). At that time, Yai, very publicly and very clearly told Smith that he would be called to task in front of the EB's FA Commission this fall; Yai kept his promise.

¶3. (SBU) In an opening intervention at the Board plenary, Yai, speaking for the Africa Group, raised specific questions regarding the perceived lack of consultations with the African states by ADG Smith prior to the DG's approval of the reform plan. (Note: We've been told by the Education Sector that they had offered times and dates that had been rejected by the African Group, though other delegations, including the Liberia, felt they had been appropriately consulted on the matter.) (Comment: Yai, though a former professor at Florida State, often seems more intent on thwarting US interests than promoting Benin's. End comment.) He also indicated that there is a lack of knowledge regarding Africa-specific education needs, questioned the hiring of Navigant, an American consulting firm, at what Yai believed to be at an exorbitant cost, and complained about the lack of proper planning regarding personnel, including a lack of

third-world candidates among Paris-based employees for reassignment to African posts, and the failure to recognize the need for an employee dedicated to the issue of South/South coordination. (Note: There have also been noises among some delegations and the Education Sector secretariat about the overly strong influence of the US in the Education Sector as a whole.) Yai also obliged both UNESCO employee unions by giving them ample time to attack the Education Sector reform plans with guns blazing during the FA Commission meeting. (Note: the employee unions have been particularly vocal and hostile to the proposed reforms. There was also a anonymous letter circulating around UNESCO filled with rumors in a vicious and personal attack on ADG Smith and his immediate staff).

¶4. (SBU) ADG Smith's overall plan for reform of the Education Sector has already been given the green light for implementation by the Director General and is not in danger. However, disgruntled delegations, led by South African and India (comment: likely in revenge for U.S. questions about Brazil-see septel) tried to force through an EB decision that was critical of Smith. The U.S. working with Canada and the United Kingdom, managed to craft a resolution that called for an investigation into the consultancy contract and requested a report at the next EB meeting, while removing language that was implicitly critical of Smith and the DG. (Note: Smith has said on several occasions that he is confident that his actions will withstand scrutiny and that he welcomes an inquiry. We also have heard rumors in recent days that the new French external auditor is being encouraged to make investigation of this contract a priority over investigation of the UNESCO Brasilia Office.)

¶5. (SBU) YO SI PUEDO. Cuba has been using UNESCO to vigorously promote its literacy training method, "Yo si puedo" (YSP), throughout the developing world to demonstrate their claims of its superiority as an effective teaching method. They have managed to keep YSP in the limelight, over the years, through clever linkages to literacy conferences, literacy prizes, etc. For this Board, the Education Sector had been asked to conduct an independent evaluation on the effectiveness of YSP, compared to other literacy training programs. The report gave YSP a lukewarm assessment overall. ADG Peter Smith, whose sector is responsible for literacy education in the context of the UN Literacy Decade, Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals, indicated that he would ensure that YSP, no matter what the result of the Executive Board's decision on its utility, would end up being "one pea in a giant bowl of pea soup".

¶6. (SBU) Several GRULAC members of the EB were not happy with the Secretariat's report and proposed an amended draft resolution that

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gave more praise to YSP. The Mission's Education Attach, successfully negotiated language to the amended text to blunt the final resolution adopted by the Board. These changes made it clear that YSP was one of many existing literacy methods that countries can use, if they choose. (Executive Board document reference 175 EX/9).

¶7. (SBU) EFA GLOBAL ACTION PLAN. The Board adopted changes to the draft resolution on the EFA Global Action Plan that noted that the directions outlined in the plan would have implications on the future work and organization of the Education Sector and specifically requested the DG to consult with the EB on all future reorganizations of UNESCO. This was included to address concerns raised by numerous Member States who opposed the way the education management reforms had been implemented. The language expresses concerns about how the process was handled but does not delay the implementation of the Education Sector management reforms. The resolution also asks the DG to consider the views that Member States expressed during this EB meeting on the education reforms and continue to update the Board on how the reforms are evolving. In addition, the EFA resolution recognized the progress being made on the Global Action Plan with the five convening agencies and requests that the DG present a revised version of the plan at the EFA High Level Working group in Cairo in November.

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